

Carolina (or elsewhere within the same region if they are of National or State significance). Such a natural area is given a high priority for protection.

It should be noted that the ranking of sites can be a difficult task. The greatest difficulty in making such a determination concerns the abundance versus rarity of natural communities and the condition of these communities. For example, there is a general abundance of Mesic Mixed Hardwood Forest in the A/P III study area, and many of these forests are in mature condition. The more common the community, even if sites are pristine, the less significant each site becomes, on a national or statewide scale. On the other hand, certain communities, such as Diabase Glades and Bay Forests, are rather rare and few of those sites are in excellent condition. Thus, a mediocre quality Diabase Glade, of a rather small acreage, might be more significant than a much larger Mesic Mixed Hardwood Forest that is nearly pristine.

The areal extent of the various natural communities is also important to consider in determining site ranks. Some communities, for example Cypress Gum Swamps, may occur over several thousand acres while other communities, such as Granitic Flatrocks, are quite limited in extent. Thus, a Cypress-Gum Swamp of very small acreage (i.e., less than 100 acres) is not likely to be of National, State, or Regional significance, whereas a 1-acre Granitic Flatrock would be sufficient in size to be of National, State, or Regional significance, assuming that the site has a moderate to high integrity.